



Mecklenburg County Public Health

In it Together: Making Health A Shared Value

Office of Community Engagement Annual Report • Project FY 7/2016 - 6/2017

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Nearly 1 million people
live in Mecklenburg

People, Pride,
Partnerships, Progress

210000

Estimated Population
Public Health Priority Areas

Executive Summary

I am thankful for the opportunity to be a leader at Mecklenburg County Public Health and serve this incredible community. It is rewarding to work with local leaders to improve opportunities for the health of Mecklenburg County residents.

We have had an amazing opportunity to exhibit compassion for community engagement, public health, and patient-centered care to help some of our most vulnerable residents in Fiscal Year 2017. While Mecklenburg County Public Health is proud of its successes in keeping Mecklenburg County healthy. Our strategic business plan is aimed to combat the existing health disparities. Mecklenburg County continues to face health inequalities that are rooted in poverty and racial divides. Our strong civic and faith leaders along with community organizations joined with the county government's shift toward "bringing services to the people" gives us the best chance to overcome these challenges.

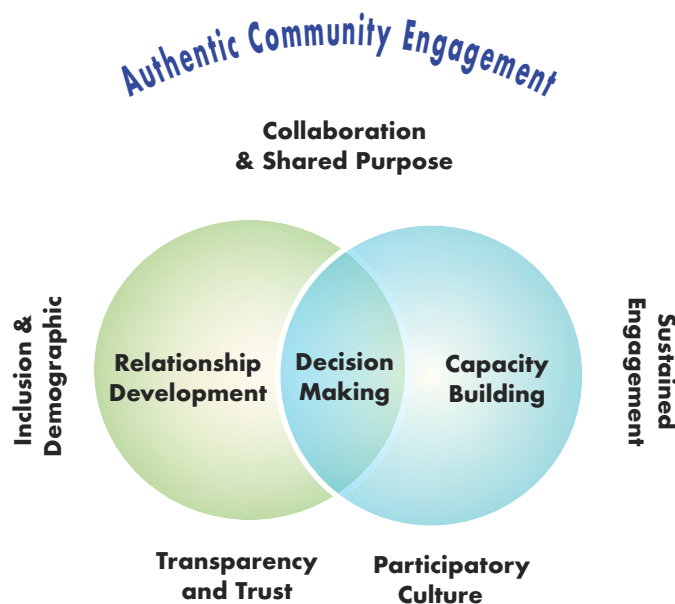
This report summarizes the community engagement work-plan activities and accomplishments from July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017. Key accomplishments included hiring a new staff member and strengthening and creating new relationships with faith-based organizations and local, regional and national organizations. It documents our efforts and responsibilities with the

Mecklenburg County Public Health Strategic Business Plan (Goal 3) to improve monitoring and increase access to resources that address health disparities in Mecklenburg County.

Mecklenburg County Public Health Strategic Business Plan (Goal 3):

1. Increase Community Engagement capacity through hiring 1 FTE Health Program Coordinator
2. Establish a minimum of 3 mini-grants to faith-based organizations (FBOs). They will serve as Village HeartBEAT mentors responsible for recruiting and training additional FBOs with clear deliverables
3. Expand outcome evaluation of the Village HeartBEAT program through enhanced data collection, analysis and reporting.

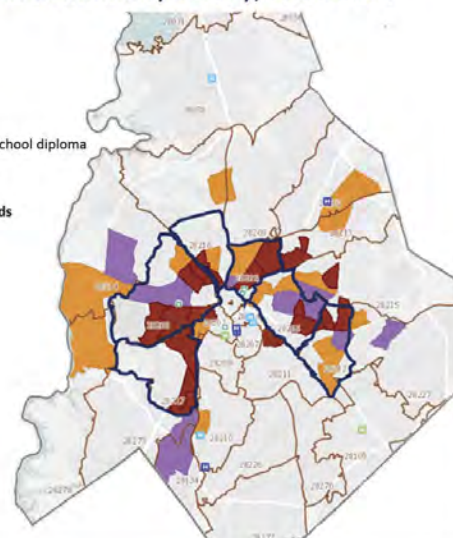
Thank you for the incredible privilege to touch lives and engage with our communities in meaningful ways to improve health. To learn more about our community involvement, please visit www.villagehb.org and [www.facebook.com/ VillageHeartBEAT/](https://www.facebook.com/VillageHeartBEAT/)



Mecklenburg County Public Health Priority Areas Data Source: American Community Survey, 2010-2014

Legend

- ≥ 25% population less than High School diploma
- ≥ 30% population below Poverty
- Populations below both Thresholds (Below Poverty Level ≥ 30% and Less than High School ≥ 25%)
- Public Hospital
- Private Hospital
- Other Hospital



Community Engagement

Background

The most recent Mecklenburg County Community Health Assessment (CHA) prioritized the prevention of premature death and disability from chronic disease as the number one public health issue in Mecklenburg County. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) tells us that half of premature deaths are the result of health behaviors and environmental factors, the leading ones being (1) Tobacco Use, (2) Lack of Nutrition, and (3) Inactivity. A public health approach to addressing these health behaviors on a community level advocates for policies and environmental systems that help “make the healthy choice the easy choice.”

These three health behaviors are also part of what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) calls “**Winnable Battles**”—public health priorities with large-scale impact on health and known effective strategies to address them.









Collaboration & Shared Purpose

Involving the community and collaborating with its members are cornerstones of efforts to improve public health. CDC Principles defined community engagement as “the

process of working collaboratively with groups of people who are affiliated by geographic proximity, special interests, or similar situations with respect to issues affecting their well-being” (CDC, 1997, p 9).”

Inclusion & Demographic

In the context of this report, community engagement refers to populations and stakeholders that are impacted by the health issues being addressed. This report focuses on high-risk regions within Mecklenburg County’s designated Public Health Priority Area (PHPA) with a population of 210,000 residents. The PHPA communities have a high proportion of African Americans (53%) and Hispanics (18%). These communities have increasing rates of cardiovascular disease (8%), hypertension (29%), and high cholesterol (33%) with heart disease being a leading cause of mortality. Engagement in unhealthy lifestyle behaviors is also increasing with overweight/obesity now impacting 57% of the population while consumption of 5+ fruits/ vegetables daily has decreased to 18% and lack of physical activity within the past month remains at 18%.

Relevant Data Selected Health Indicator (data source)	Meck	NC	Trend in Mecklenburg compared to previous years	Racial and Ethnic Health Disparity Ratios	
				African Americans/ Blacks	Whites
2016, Adults reporting current smoking (BRFSS)	16%	19% (2015)	Stable →	 1.4 to 1	
2016, Adults reporting overweight/obesity (BRFSS)	61%	66% (2015)	Stable →	 1.3 to 1	
2014, Adults consuming 5 or more Fruits/Vegetables per day (BRFSS)	18%	13% (2015)	Undetermined ?	 1 to 1.3	
2016, Adults reporting no physical activity (BRFSS)	17%	26% (2015)	Stable →	 2.3 to 1	



Village HeartBEART partners with American Heart Association and participates in National Walking Day.

Fiscal Year 17: Performance Measures

Section I. Mecklenburg County Public Health Strategic Business Plan

There were three major FY 17 objectives outlined for Community Engagement:

1. Increase Community Engagement capacity through hiring 1 FTE Health Program Coordinator.

Brief Summary:

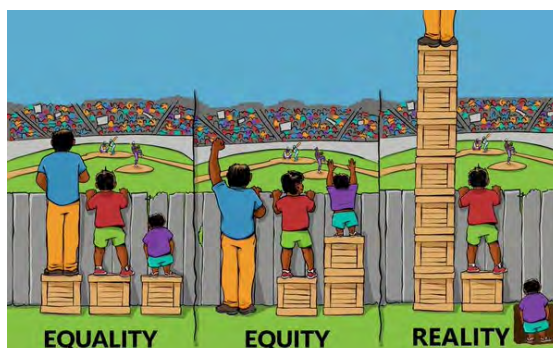
- Jamar Davis selected as a transfer hire with five years of experience with Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation. Impact of the Position: This position supported the Community Engagement Division/Senior Health Managers of Programs, expanding the reach of social media communications, additional community partnership (including expanding VHB Network by 140% from 25 to 60 churches), convening multidisciplinary teams, committees, task forces, and maintaining collaborative projects. Additional value of responsibilities included: database management, management of social media, committee support including agendas and minutes, best-practice research, development of communication materials, and program documentation to support the Public Health Strategic Business/Community Engagement Plan.
- 2. Establish a minimum of three (3) mini-grants to faith-based organizations (FBOs). They will serve as Village HeartBEAT mentors responsible for recruiting and training additional FBOs with clear deliverables.

Brief Summary:

- There were five FBOs selected and approved by procurement contract management office to receive a mini grant for the total amount of twelve thousand dollars. (15th Street Church of God, Faith CME Church, First Baptist Church West, Rockwell AME Zion Church, and Camino Community Center). The five participating FBOs completed and exceeded all required contract deliverables. Each of the FBOs Hubs Completed the following: 8 mandatory trainings, 4 data resource tools developed by Gramercy Research (Participant Registration Survey, Congregational Health Assessment, Pastors Assessment, and Predicting Readiness to Engage All Churches in Health Assessment) and implemented three areas of Evidence Based Interventions (tobacco, nutrition, physical activity), including the following as examples: Posted Signage of Tobacco Free Campus, Nutritional Policies (Urban Gardens, Increase Water Consumption, No Fry Zones, Reduce Sugar Intake), and Physical Activity laying the foundation to environmental space for exercise/work-out room, on-site weekly cardio-exercise classes and weekly walking teams.
- 3. Expand outcome evaluation of the Village HeartBEAT program through enhanced data collection, analysis and reporting.

Brief Summary:

The Gramercy Research Group was selected to strengthen and enhance Village HeartBEAT data collection, analysis and reporting. The Gramercy Research Group LLC Contract (29098759) was approved by Contract Management office on 10/31/2016. In brief, the Gramercy



Research Group, LLC's mission is to develop sustainable strategies that promote and improve the health and well-being of the public. Gramercy has a long-standing track record, with proven health outcomes working with

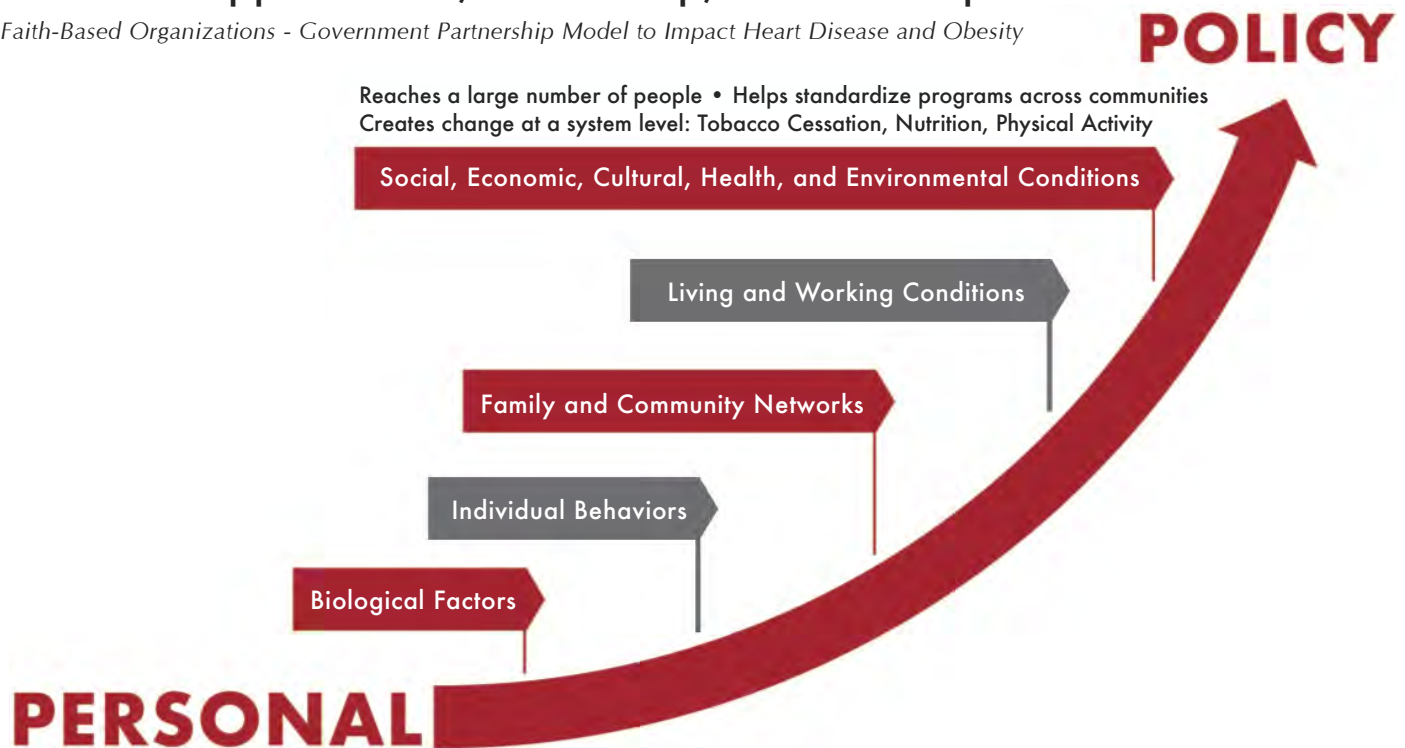
KEY DELIVERABLES

- Developed 4 resource data collection tools (Participant Registration Survey, Congregational Health Assessment, Pastors Assessment, and PREACH Assessment).
- Data processing and management for new FBOs for PREACH survey, pastor assessments, and congregational health assessments
- Data analysis and synthesis for FBO survey completion for hub churches,
- Created online data entry template for VHB pre-post assessments
- Monitored data entry for VHB pre-post assessments
- Provided interim data analyses for VHB to determine targets for intervention
- Data processing and management for VHB assessments
- Data analysis and synthesis for VHB, Calculate results for VHB post-season celebration
- Healthiest Cities and Counties Stakeholder Coalition meeting to finalize logic model and evaluation plan

Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) Resource Hubs

Business Opportunities, Leadership, and Development

Faith-Based Organizations - Government Partnership Model to Impact Heart Disease and Obesity



Mecklenburg County Board of County Commissioners approved faith-based organizations government-partnership for Fiscal Year 2017, a pilot intervention for the Public Health Department, to invest in five FBOs as Resource Hubs and equip them to make sustainable, policy system and health-related environmental changes to impact Heart Disease and Obesity.

What is Village HeartBEAT?

Our Health, Our Priority, Our Zipcodes, Our Community

The Village HeartBEAT (Building Education & Accountability Together)

program is a collaborative program organized to reduce risk-factors associated with cardiovascular disease (CVD) through African American and Hispanic/Latino Faith-Based Organizations (FBO) in Charlotte, NC. The overarching goal is to invest in FBOs as mutual business partners to adopt effective and sustainable policy, systems and environmental change (PSE) strategies to enhance healthier lifestyle choices, develop tobacco-free sites, implement sustainable physical activities and nutritional options.

VHB incorporates a 10-month FBOs competition team-challenge that uses a community-based framework to

provide tools and resources to improve healthy outcomes.

The intervention is divided into three phases:

I. Pre-Season (recruitment, needs and policy-assessments, action plans, joint-use agreements, competition rules, and pre-biometrics screenings)

II. 16-Week Competition Season - "Championship Playoffs" (tracking health/wellness educational activities, post-biometric screenings, data collection and awards/recognitions)

III. Post-Season (planning, information dissemination, evaluation and advocacy trainings).

OUR CORE COMPONENTS:

- Competition Challenge (10 Team Members)
- American Heart Association (AHA) Policy, Systems, and Environmental Change (PSE)
- Pre/Post-Biometric Screenings
- Digital Literacy
- Spanish 101
- CPR & First Aid Certification
- Tobacco Cessation Classes
- 'With Every Heartbeat is Life,' Curriculum Series Training
- AHA Healthy for Life Curriculum
- Nutrition Courses with Food Journaling & Healthy Cooking Demonstrations
- Custom Exercise Plans with Fitness Workshops
- Trained Health Ambassadors
- Check. Change. Control. Program
- The Million Hearts Initiative

The Thereasea C. Elder

Community Health Leadership Academy



Dedication Ceremony Honoring Mrs. Thereasea Clark Elder, BSN, RN

THE ACADEMY is an innovative solution to advance chronic disease prevention strategies in Charlotte. It is the foundation of the Village HeartBEAT (Building Education Accountability Together) Program. The academy will train Community Health Ambassadors in local congregations and interfaith communities. The ambassadors will gain information and resource tools to

teach them about basic health issues as well as chronic diseases within their communities. The ambassadors will learn about health and human services.

THE VISION of the Thereasea Clark Elder Community Health Leadership Academy is to advance health by increasing leaders' capacity among faith-based organizations to transcend

boundaries, work collaboratively and transform their communities.

CORE COMPONENTS are divided into conversation circles of learning, and training. The Fall cycle will focus on human services issues. The spring cycle will focus on Public Health and Chronic Disease Prevention.

FY17 Measure Name	FY17 Measure Calculation	FY17 Target
% of customers that showed improvement in at least 1 health outcome (Weight, BMI, Diastolic & Systolic Blood Pressure, and A1c)	# of participants that have an improvement in at least one health outcome/# of total participants (n=280)	<p>96% of participants (265) showed improvement in at least one health outcome</p> <p>68% of participants (190) lost weight</p> <p>56% of participants (156) reduced systolic blood pressure</p> <p>52% of participants (146) reduced diastolic blood pressure</p> <p>60% of participants (161) reduced hemoglobin A1c</p>
Customer Service (e.g., Satisfaction ratings of quality service, outreach activities, events, and information)	For each of the four (4) questions: total number of "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" responses/ Total number of overall responses	99.47%
% of enrolled FBOs that through the establishment of a health ministry adopt policies that support healthy choices	# of FBOs showing successful implementation/# of FBOs enrolled (n=5)	100%

FY17 Final Results

(in brief)

This year Village Heart B.E.A.T. focused on expansion to include additional church and participants in the program. We add 11 new churches (64% growth), growing from 17 to 28 participating churches and from 170 to 280 competition participants. This does not include 3 additional churches that participated in the program but not the competition. In addition, competition teams were limited to 10 per church and the 280 participants do not reflect additional team members who were not part of competition teams.

When programs expand impact can become diluted while the program adjusts to managing provision of the same magnitude and consistency of services to a larger population. This year, the magnitude of change was slightly less than last year for variables of interest; however, and importantly, effect sizes were similar and in the expected direction (improvement) for all variables of interest.

VARIABLE		
Year	2015-2016	2016-2017
Sites (Churches)	17	28
Competition Participants	170	280
Weight Change	-4.7 + 9.6 lbs (p<0.00)	-3.1 + 6.9 lbs (p<0.01)
BMI Change	-0.8 + 1.6 kg/m2 (p<0.00)	-0.5 + 1.1 kg/m2 (p<0.01)
Systolic Blood Pressure Change	-3.6 + 13.4 mmHg (p<0.00)	-2.9 + 15.3 mmHg (p<0.01)
Diastolic Blood Pressure Change	-1.4 + 8.5 mmHg (p=0.03)	-1.1 + 8.6 mmHg (p=0.02)
HbA1C Change	-0.3 + 2.1% (p=0.09)	-0.2 + 0.7% (p<0.01)



BOCC Meeting



Chair Aerobics



CPR & First Aid Certification



Digital Literacy



5k Walk/Run



Biometrics



MLK Parade



Pastors Strategic Planning



Healthy Kids Day



Kick Off Celebration



Orientation



CHLA Dedication Ceremony



AWARDS & RECOGNITION

African American Collaborative Obesity Research Network (AACORN)	July 2016, Presentation
Healthiest Cities & Counties Challenge (HCCC)	Sept. 2016, 1st Round Seed Money Awarded
C. Emanuel	Jan. 2017, Keep the Dream Alive Award presented by the Johnson C. Smith and MLK Community Committee
C. Emanuel	March 2017, Selected by Radio One - Women of Excellence Award - Charlotte Region
HCCC	April 2017, AETNA Foundation, Executive Director Visit
HCCC	May 2017, VHB Published in American Public Health Association (APHA) Newsletter "The Nation's Health"
Jamar Davis	June 2017, Graduate - Park and Rec. Leadership Academy
HCCC	July 2017, Selected as Presenter for HCCC Institute at National Association of Counties (NACo) Conference
Net Exchange Advisory Team	Sept. 2017, Presentation
American Public Health Association (APHA),	Nov. 2017, Presentation



Village HeartBEAT
Building Education & Accountability Together
A Mecklenburg County Initiative

OUR HEALTH, OUR ZIPCODES, OUR PRIORITY

**WE ARE DYING TOO SOON
BECAUSE WE LIVE HERE**



JOIN OUR MOVEMENT TO SAVE LIVES

WWW.VILLAGEHB.ORG | WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/VILLAGEHEARTBEAT



PEOPLE, PRIDE, PROGRESS, PARTNERSHIPS



African-Americans are 2x more likely to be overweight and die of heart disease than White Americans.

We are Fighting for Our Lives!



Ben Salem
Presbyterian Church team captain
Arthur "AJ" Johns lost over 200 pounds.

New Covenant Bibleway Church team captain
Erica Marshall lost 65 pounds.

Join Our Movement

www.VillageHB.org

 VillageHeartBeat



Two Village HeartBEAT members share a passion for healthy cooking

What started as an effort to help family members get healthy developed into a lifelong cooking habit for two church members.



Kat Harris and Marvin Byrd, both members of St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church, answer questions during a healthy-cooking workshop hosted at the church by Village HeartBEAT. (Photo: Qcitymetro.com)

Positive change can sometimes flow from difficult spaces in our lives.

Take the story of Marvin Byrd and Kat Harris, both members of St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church in Charlotte. While learning to care for family members diagnosed with diabetes, each discovered a passion for healthy cooking – and they are now teamed up to spread that passion throughout the Mecklenburg County Health Department's Village HeartBEAT program.

Harris, whose day job is in corporate procurement, said she started cooking healthy after diabetes and high blood pressure impaired her maternal grandmother. For Byrd, now retired, the lifestyle shift came shortly after his wife was diagnosed.

"She wanted to get off insulin, so we started looking at alternative cooking," he told Qcitymetro during a recent interview.

Their commitment to healthy cooking was on display last month when Village HeartBEAT hosted a cooking workshop for participants in the faith-based program. The menu included meats cooked with no salt and desserts baked with no sugar.

Of special note was a butternut squash and carrot soufflé, spiced with a touch of orange juice, Agave nectar and lemon juice. Some said it tasted like sweet potato pie.

And that's the point of healthy cooking, Harris and Byrd said – you need not sacrifice taste to prepare healthy meals.

How it all got started

Neither Byrd nor Harris is trained in the culinary arts.

"We're strong in the community and love the Lord,

but we also love cooking for people," said Harris.

The two became friends while volunteering at their church, especially in the food pantry. They also bonded during a 32-week discipleship class they shared – Harris frequently cooked dinner for the group, while Byrd made tasty desserts.

After St. Luke Baptist became part of the Village HeartBEAT program, the two agreed to become its ambassadors for healthy cooking, and they are now brainstorming ideas for a Village HeartBEAT cookbook – all with healthy recipes, of course.

Despite their shared interest, they have their differences: When baking cakes, for example, Harris does not use eggs; Byrd does.

"I'm like no salt, no nuts," she said.

And while Harris said she eats out "very, very rarely," Byrd said he doesn't mind letting a stranger cook on occasion, though he tries to find restaurants that offer healthy menu options.

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Diane Carter, first-time Village HeartBeat member, excited to be on the team

Suffering from chronic back pain for 12 years,
this 15th Street Church of God member is finally seeing some relief.

BY MORDECIA D. STRICKLAND

Name: Diane Carter: 71 years old
Church: 15th Street Church of God
Health Factors: Chronic back pain, high cholesterol



Diane Carter is excited. For the first time in 12 years, her efforts to alleviate chronic back pain are paying off.

She's had injections, taken pain medicine and done everything short of surgery, she said. She'd been working out at the McCrorey YMCA, taking water arthritis classes for several years, but it wasn't until

Diane Carter

she joined the 15th Street Church of God Village HeartBeat team that she started to see significant improvement with her back issues.

Under her training plan with Village HeartBeat, Carter switched to the water cardio fitness class, which she does seven times a week, and "it's really, really working," she said. She hasn't had to take pain medicine since November.

And she started walking regularly. Every other Saturday morning, she and her niece, a member of a different Village HeartBeat team, walk 14 times around the track at the

McCrorey Y. She first started walking with a cane or a walker, but said she doesn't need to use either now. In March, she participated in the Village HeartBeat 5k Run/Walk — her first walk in 18 years — and did not have to use a cane. "Every step of the way, I could not believe it," she said with pride.

Carter also has a slightly elevated cholesterol levels, but she said she's managing it well enough that she no longer has to take medication.

She's lost 15 pounds and has seen a marked improvement in her BMI. Her "back feels great — not perfect, but great," Carter said.

"Since January, I've been so excited. As long as I live, I will join Village HeartBeat every year."

Everybody is a winner

Carter's church has fielded a Village HeartBeat team for several years, but this is her first year on the team. Because she was already working out, she didn't see a need to join Village HeartBeat. But she would often see fellow church members at the Y and they were always so "upbeat and excited" about Village HeartBeat. She decided to join the team and is happy that she did.

"I can't believe we get all of this nurturing, care, information, and guidance," Carter said. "It's almost like I'm going to the doctor for free."

Carter gets inspired at the weigh-ins where she says "everybody comes out a winner; nobody comes out sad."

She loves the challenges, biometric assessments and that everyone is held accountable for making team goals. When

she doesn't feel like exercising, she said she thinks about her team out in the cold, walking the track. That gets her moving.

"I had no idea that (Village HeartBeat) would help me this much," Carter said. "I'm embarrassed that this is my first year."

Praise for Village HeartBeat

But it won't be her last if she can help it. Carter said she will do everything she can to support Village HeartBeat and make sure it's an annual thing.

She is thankful that Village HeartBeat is helping wipe out the "madness — these diseases we've been plagued with for generations" — and for "providing us with the knowledge to take care of ourselves," Carter said.

"We are taking this home to our loved ones, sisters and brothers," she said. "Even the doctors are excited about it."

She is especially grateful for the effect Village HeartBeat is having on the church's senior members — they have a "glow on their faces," Carter said.

Carter is looking forward to the fifth Annual Hearts of Champions Gala in May. She's having a crinoline skirt made to go under her dress, she said.

"I'm so excited — and so grateful."



WWW.VILLAGEHB.ORG

Meet the Village HeartBEAT team captains for Greater Bethel AME church

Mary Alice Haynes-Smith and Howard Gaston, Greater Bethel AME church, Village HeartBEAT team captains

BY MORDECIA D. STRICKLAND

As a member of Greater Bethel's senior program for six years, Howard Gaston had long wanted to implement a wellness program for seniors that would be effective. Gaston would facilitate senior sessions where they'd learn about how to get on the path to better health, and "we would come away from meetings ... all fired up. But not having a structure to which we could implement some of those things, our enthusiasm would wane," Gaston said.

He tried to create his own program, researching and submitting proposals for funding, but had no luck.

Lifelong member Mary Alyce Haynes-Smith had met Cheryl Emanuel a couple of years ago in at the McCrorey YMCA. Emanuel, the Mecklenburg County senior health manager who created the Village HeartBEAT program, told her about the program and invited her to several events. Haynes-Smith knew this was the right fit for Greater Bethel and persuaded Gaston to meet with Emmanuel.

The result: Greater Bethel joined 30 other Village HeartBEAT teams in the fight to get healthy, and team members are already seeing some of the hoped-for results.

Qcitymetro talked with the team captains about their first year in the Village HeartBEAT program. Their comments are edited for clarity and brevity.

About the team:

The Greater Bethel team: Nine women and four men, including Gaston and Haynes-Smith. All team members are senior citizens, except one.

Howard Gaston, 84, has attended Greater Bethel since 1999 when he moved to Charlotte from Philadelphia. Personal goals: To get off of some of the medications he's taking and better control his diabetes, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure.

Mary Alyce Haynes-Smith, 76, retired from teaching at Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in 2010. She's a lifelong member of Greater Bethel. Personal goals: Maintain and be consistent with exercising and learn how to eat healthier.

On motivating the team

"At first, they were reluctant, but now, since they are really seeing what Village HeartBEAT is all about, they are participating more," said Haynes-Smith. "Every Monday, five team members go to the (McCrorey Y) for water aerobics. And at the beginning of the program, they didn't want to do anything like that. But now they are becoming more committed and dedicated because they are seeing results."

At senior group meetings, Gaston said, members used to come in, sit down and play dominoes. Now they walk in the parking lot for a half hour. Team members have really responded to the program, coming up with ways of make exercise fun, Gaston said. "It's not my enthusiasm alone; it's their enthusiasm, too."

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Mary Alice Haynes-Smith and Howard Gaston, Greater Bethel AME church, Village HeartBEAT team captains



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Follow your team as Village HeartBEAT launches a new season of healthy competition



Scene at the Carolinas HealthCare System Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Parade in uptown Charlotte, January 14, 2017. (Photo: Glenn H. Burkins for Qcitymetro.com)

BY QCITY STAFF

And they're off. The competition to get healthy is underway. On Jan. 15, Village HeartBEAT kicked off its fifth season with nearly 30 churches signed up to take part in this year's 10-month wellness program.

The faith-based program, which is run by the Mecklenburg County Health Department, seeks to reduce health factors associated with heart disease and diabetes in African American and Latino communities, and it has been picked to compete in a national challenge that could net the program up to \$500,000.

Village HeartB.E.A.T (Building Education and Accountability Together) works with local churches to encourage exercise, proper nutrition, smoking cessations and overall health management. The churches compete, with 10-member teams, in categories including weight

loss and overall participation.

The program lasts for 10 months, which includes a 16-week exercise and weight-loss competition period. Although the 16-week competition emphasizes weight loss — congregations in 2016 lost a combined 393.06 pounds — the teams also compete in other health-related areas, such as blood pressure reduction, exercise participation, and journaling.

At the end of each year's competition, awards are given to individuals and churches that record the greatest progress in various health categories.

Also this year, Village HeartBEAT will compete in the Healthiest Cities & Counties Challenge — a partnership between the Aetna Foundation, the American Public Health Association and the

National Association of Counties.

Each organization participating in the challenge will be visited by a panel of judges. Those that show the most measurable progress will be eligible for cash awards of \$25,000 to \$500,000.

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Busy mom makes time to get healthy with Village HeartBEAT program

Karen Flores, the mother of five children, thought she was pretty healthy though she needed to lose some weight. Then tests showed some lurking health problems.

BY MORDECIA D. STRICKLAND



Name: Karen Flores: Married, 27 years old, 5 kids — ages 6 months to 7 years

Church: Camino Community Center
Health Factors: High cholesterol, hypothyroidism

Her Story: Karen Flores, the mother of five young children, thought she was pretty healthy, except she needed to lose some weight.

When she was approached about joining Camino's Village HeartBEAT team, she jumped at the chance to take advantage of the resources provided, such as the ability to work out at the McCrory YMCA and take healthy-cooking classes. Hispanics don't have the healthiest of diets, Flores acknowledges, and too often, they lead sedentary lifestyles.

"As a mom, you're always thinking about your kids' needs and not so much about your own," Flores said, but she figured she could make the time to focus on herself a little.

At first, the pounds were coming off, good results week after week, then the weight-loss stopped. Flores talked to her doctor and after some tests, she was diagnosed with hypothyroidism, for which she now takes medication. Through the program's biometric screenings, she also discovered her cholesterol was high.

Flores credits being part of the Village HeartBEAT team for uncovering these problems before they could worsen. "If you have good healthy routines, you can see the difference when you have a health problem," she said.

Keeping it simple

Flores said even though the kids keep her busy, it's not impossible to find time to exercise. She focuses on the simple things, such as walking, or doing a fun activity like dancing. And she involves the kids. "If I'm walking, I take them" and she explains to them that walking is good for a healthy heart, a healthy body, she said.

When she has the time, she works out at the Y, which offers free drop-in childcare, learns new exercise routines from her trainer and participates in water aerobics.

She's made simple changes to meals, for example, wheat breads instead of white breads, apples instead of chips for snacking. And she's learned the value of rest.

At first, Flores said, she was so excited to be part of the program that she tried to do too many Village HeartBEAT activities and she was wearing herself out. Now when the baby takes a nap, so does she.

About Village HeartBEAT

Flores enjoys the fellowship with other Village HeartBEAT teams and having a common goal. "It doesn't matter what church you attend, or who invites you," she said. "We all have the same goal — to be healthy."

Village HeartBEAT provides resources that Flores wishes more people in the community could access. Some people have an income that allows them to pay for a gym or private classes with a trainer, but families like hers can't afford that, she said. "I need to take advantage of this program," Flores said. "If I could do it every year, I would."

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Village HeartBEAT Accepts the Challenge!

Reduce Heart Disease & Obesity



The Challenge aims to improve measurable health outcomes and promote health, wellness, equity and social interaction through practical, evidence-based strategies and cross-sector collaboration. Cities and counties were chosen based on having strong cross-sector teams focused on public health issues that reflected community priorities.

Mecklenburg County's Village HeartBEAT program will work to reduce heart disease and obesity in public health priority zip code areas. VHB will expand the number of participating faith-based communities, enhance the network of partner organizations, connect members to community-based social services, and create policy changes to promote healthy behaviors within congregations and local communities.